

Preview Statement of Chairman Richard Burr

June 16, 2016

I'd like to welcome our witness today, Central Intelligence Agency Director John Brennan. John, you appropriately note in your opening statement that this hearing takes place "against the backdrop of a heinous act of violence" perpetrated by a troubled and evil person. The Committee has been in constant contact with the FBI from the early morning hours on Sunday and has been provided a great deal of information on the status of the investigation.

I know that your team, along with your intelligence community partners, are also working to determine if the killer had any connection to a foreign terrorist group like ISIL. Let me thank your officers for what they do and for the long hours they are likely putting in to understand this tragedy while also focusing on the wide range of threats facing our nation.

John, I know your organization understands the threat posed by ISIL and there has been much public discussion about progress the U.S.-led coalition has made to "contain" ISIL's geographic reach, to degrade its finance and media operations, and to remove its fighters from the battlefield. However, while progress may have been made against those goals, you note in your statement that "our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach." That assessment is significant.

I want to take this moment to speak not only to you, John, but also to the American people. We live in an open society – one that values freedom and diversity. The Islamic State is recruiting individuals by leveraging that freedom and taking advantage of misguided hate to attack us and, in doing so, to divide us. ISIL's global battlefield now includes the United States and we cannot stand idly by – we must take the fight to them. We must attack them where they raise funds, where they plan, and where they recruit. We must deny them their safe haven.

We cannot negotiate with extremists who seek only to kill – and we will not. I am not willing to accept the events in San Bernardino and Orlando as the new normal. Nor should anyone. We should be able to live securely in a free society. And we are not alone. Our friends in Europe, and Asia, and across the world, should be able to go to sporting events, and concerts, and dance clubs, and experience life with their families in safety.

We will unite as a nation and as a coalition to confront ISIL and deny them safe haven. But we can only do so with a realistic, proactive, aggressive, and well defined strategy. And – frankly – we have to own it and embrace it.

Now is not the time to pay lip service to these threats. The sooner we as a nation realize that there is only one path for us to take at this juncture, the sooner we will destroy ISIL and ensure the continued safety of our nation.

John, I do not make these comments lightly and I am confident you will highlight during your testimony these and other threats to our nation. Before I turn to the Vice Chairman, I ask that you relay to your entire organization my thanks and appreciation for their work. Your officers work in the shadows, often in austere and dangerous environments, day-in and day-out, to keep us safe. Their selfless dedication to their fellow citizens should be commended and we are in their debt.

Thank you again and I look forward to your opening statement. I now turn to the Vice Chairman.